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MR. KENDAL'S
S E R M O N
ON THE
LOVE OF GOD.



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LOVE
AN ESSENTIAL ATTRIBUTE OF
DEITY.



A
SERMON,

DELIVERED

AT THE FIRST PARISH

IN

ROXBURY,

NOVEMBER 16, 1794.

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ROHT
Published at the Request of the Hearers.



Printed by SAMUEL HALL, No. 53, Cornhill. BOSTON.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following Discourse was not composed with a view to it's publication. The request of a number, in whose audience it was delivered, at the first parish in ROXBURY, is the Author's only apology for submitting it to the public. To those who have requested the publication of it, he would mention, that some observations were made, at the time of delivery, which had not been committed to writing; for which they will now depend on the speaker's memory. He hath endeavoured to preserve the ideas and expressions as far as he could; and hopes they will find no unpleasing change in either. He does not feel himself at liberty to make any material alterations. He submits it to their and the public's candid perusal. If it should assist any to form worthy and consistent ideas of the DIVINE CHARACTER, and induce them to yield to the endearments of that LOVE, which was the subject of it; that in HEAVEN they may be the happy objects of it, and celebrate it's praises, it will answer the fervent prayer, and gratify the most ardent wishes, of



THE AUTHOR.

1. JOHN, IV. 16.

—GOD IS LOVE.—

FROM a misapprehension of the nature, perfections, and character of God, arise the most foolish and dangerous errors in faith and practice. The religion of mankind generally comports with their notions of the object of their worship. A prophet pertinently observes, that "all people will walk every one in the name of his God."

If the false notions some entertain of the Supreme Jehovah be indicative of the peculiar turn and temper of their mind, which many would not controvert, it will likewise be found, they determine the general complexion of their religious sentiments, cherish a wrong disposition, and lead to correspondent actions.

When men conceive the *sovereignty* of God is fitly represented by the capricious conduct of lawless tyrants, according to which the ideas of some appear
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to be formed, they will be found, generally speaking, to possess both a servile and tyrannic disposition. If they doubt of the truth and faithfulness of God, or imagine he hath declared and commanded one thing in his word, when he absolutely and even *influentially* wills the contrary, may it not be expected they can act a double part without remorse?

If they suppose that Deity is fired with vindictive wrath, and delighted with the misery of his creatures, shall we discover in them any true benevolence? Can we expect to discover in them a more amiable and lovely disposition than they ascribe to the object of their worship? Will they not "walk in the name of their God?" Let scripture and experience decide. But if, on the other hand, they believe *God is love*, shall we not discover something of the same divine temper? A little attention will convince us, that the temper and actions of our fellow-creatures do, more or less, correspond with the ideas they entertain of the Supreme Being.

Hence it appears to be of great importance to form the most worthy and consistent notions of God. He is the only proper object of our worship; and ought to be viewed, contemplated, admired, and loved, as the great standard of all perfection.

The highest perfection of saints on earth, or in glory, consists in the nearest possible conformity to the moral attributes of Deity. This being an ob-
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servation founded in truth, it is, evidently, of vast importance to the moral character of man, to have pure, just, and honorable ideas of the divine perfections. The text, duly considered, may serve to correct the notions some entertain of the Deity, and give to all a just view of an essential part of his character.

GOD IS LOVE. This form of expression forcibly impresses the mind with the pleasing idea, that *love* is an essential attribute of Deity. Power, wisdom, justice, holiness, and love, are equally essential to him; and they harmonize in every design, in all his works. Take away these essential attributes, and it will destroy in idea, the very being of a God. For instance; deny either power or wisdom to be essential to the divine nature, and we at once destroy all ideas of a God. For it is impossible to conceive of a Creator and universal Governor of the world, without including power and wisdom in the idea. And St. John, whose words are echoed by every warbling bird, and from every part of creation, as fully ascribes love to God, as an essential perfection of his nature, as any other man can do either power or wisdom. Love, then, if we can trust the authority of inspiration, the voice of reason, and the language of experience, is as much an essential attribute of Deity as either power or wisdom. And is it not as certainly and as constantly exercised in all the divine operations

tions as the other ; and in perfect harmony with every perfection of his nature ?

Goodness and grace are ascribed to God in almost every page of the sacred writings ; and are legibly written in the whole volume of nature. But what is goodness, or grace, in operation, but the exercise of love toward their objects ? This, perhaps, is a proper definition of both. Infinity belongs as much to the love as to the power and wisdom of God. We cannot conceive, or admit, that either is limited by its opposite imperfection. Power, wisdom, and love infinite, do not consist with weakness, folly, and hatred. Suppose the latter, and we must give up the infinity of the former. Neither does the harmony of the divine perfections reduce either of them below the scale of infinity. The power of God is not less infinite because the exercise of it is directed by wisdom, goodness, and love ; nor is his love less perfect because it harmonizes with his justice and holiness, which can never admit sin to be an object of it. Such is the harmony of the divine perfections, that we may consider even the justice of God to be an important and awful branch of his goodness. They are not in opposition the one to the other ; but harmonize in the same grand design.

The essential love of God can no more be limited by hatred, than his power can be by weakness, his wisdom by folly, his justice by unrighteousness, or
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his holiness by sin. Let this be fixed in the mind, as a certain maxim, which may be admitted with great safety, and we shall at once renounce every scheme of religion, which represents the Divine Being as hateful towards his creatures. And the more clear and consistent ideas we have of perfect love, exercised in harmony with perfect justice and holiness, the more pure and worthy will be our apprehensions, or notions, of God.

But of the attribute of love, as well as of every other divine perfection, we must form our idea according to our common notions of love, and its apparent effects. We have no other way to form an idea of the justice of God but by our common sense, or notions, of justice. And we manifestly dishonor him in our own view, if we ascribe any thing to him, which evidently militates against our common and clearest ideas of justice. Nor does it help the matter in the least, to say, it is just in God to do whatsoever he pleases, if we say, he pleases to do that which is in itself unjust. While we ascribe that to God, which is absolutely unjust, according to our measure and received rules of justice, it is impossible that we should contemplate him as a perfect character, or feel that reverence, which is due to an infinitely just, holy, and good Being. Much the same may be said of his love. It can never be contaminated by hatred: and, therefore, nothing should be

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ascribed to him, which, if admitted to form a trait in his character, will fix in the human mind an idea of such an imperfection.

Love is a bright, transcendent, operative excellency of the divine nature. The glory of this perfection hath been strikingly displayed in and by its own operations. From its effects we are, in a great measure, to learn what it is, as an operative principle, or perfection, of the divine nature. As such it may, perhaps, be thus defined : A disposition, inclination, or native propensity, to acts of goodness, which shall increase the *quantum* of happiness in the universe ; and a complacency in the happiness of being in general.

The benevolence of Deity is the effect of his love, and consists in universal good will to his creatures. Human love is excited by the apprehension of some excellency in the object of it, or of some suitableness in it to promote our own happiness. But the love of God is, if I may so speak, a native impulsive principle, inclining him to give a degree of excellency and happiness to all his creatures ; and is always exercised towards them, so far as is consistent with his wisdom, justice, and holiness. He does not derive happiness from them ; but it is his nature, and one of the essential excellencies of it, to communicate it to them. This eternal principle moved him, at first, to create various orders of being, and to capacitate

tate them for different degrees of happiness ; and hath been, to the present day, evidenced by innumerable acts of goodness. Though it should be urged that his own glory is the primary and ultimate object of God, in all his works, it will not prove that love hath not guided his determinations, and directed him in all his mighty operations. For, by this he hath secured his own glory, and prepared millions to behold, admire, and celebrate it. If we contemplate the works of nature and providence, we shall find this inscription on the whole creation : **GOD IS LOVE.** All nature evidences the divine benignity, and impresses on the mind of the rational observer the truth of the text.

The most ample provision hath been made for the happiness of God's creatures, according to their rank and capacity. His providence protects, and his bounty supplies them. Man, of all creatures, hath the least reason to suspect, the least right to complain, that God is not essentially love. For he holds a superior rank in the scale of being, was at first distinguished from other creatures by higher powers and privileges, and by the means of more noble, refined, and lasting pleasure and happiness ; and hath, since his apostasy, been the subject of redeeming grace, or the object of that love, which shines with transcendent glory in the economy of redemption. This work, which is the wonder of angels, is a decisive

five proof, that God hath no delight in the misery of his creatures, though the just consequence of their own folly and disobedience. His justice and holiness, which are but lines drawn from this common centre, love to order, purity, rectitude, and happiness, prevent his approbation of sin, and require the punishment of the impenitent sinner, according to the nature of his offence. But the exercise and display of these perfections, justice and holiness, can never prove that hatred to any creature is an ingredient in the divine character; but the contrary. Nor is such an unworthy thought to be collected from the divine administration, or the volume of inspiration, without great misconstruction.

The highest instance of God's love, and the most surprizing effects of it, are discovered in the economy of man's redemption, in sending his Son JESUS CHRIST into the world, to die for sinners. The whole history of redemption treats of the exercises of divine love towards lapsed guilty man. But it will never be pretended that there was any moral excellency in lapsed man, to excite the love of God, or to render him a worthy and meritorious object of it. The originating and moving cause of all the goodness and grace, manifested in the scheme of redemption, was and is essentially in God. Love was the spring and principle, from which the gracious overtures of peace took their rise. As demonstrated to our fallen race

race by the mission, mediation, and sufferings, of CHRIST, it is incomparable and incomprehensible. This essential perfection of Deity, as well as his power and wisdom, hath raised to itself everlasting monuments of praise.

To display his power and wisdom, as well as to express his goodness, the eternal God spake our world into existence, and peopled it with creatures of various forms. To make a greater exhibition of his grandeur and glory, he created heaven for the ministering spirits before his throne. And, when man had fallen by disobedience, to make a brighter and more illustrious manifestation of his love, which is an equally essential perfection of his nature, he contrived and accomplished the redemption of sinners by the mediation of his beloved Son! This work, which requires angelic powers fully to celebrate the glory of it, is the effect of his essential love. The plan of it is the result of his infinite wisdom. His justice and holiness, harmonizing with his love, and not mere caprice, as the language of some implies, determine who are to be the final and everlasting subjects of redeeming grace. None of the human race will be finally excluded, but those whom justice and holiness must exclude, because they are unqualified subjects. If the objects are perfectly equal, as all are by nature, in a moral view, that love, which gave birth to the plan of redemption, will make

make no distinction, in the final issue, between one and another. If it should, the principle is not uniform in its operation. But allowing the justice and holiness of God to make the distinction between one and another, at the day of general retribution, it will no more limit the exercises of his love, than wisdom and goodness limit the exercises of his power. The future condemnation and punishment of the impenitent sinner are no proof that God is not essentially love, any more than his not exerting his power in a given case, which wisdom sees to be unfit, proves that power is not essential to him. Should God, regardless of the harmony of his own perfections, delight only in exercising his infinite power, how soon might this, and the unnumbered worlds scattered through the whole immensity of space, be thrown from their centre, and reduced to a chaos! But wisdom and goodness guide the operations of his power, to preserve the order, the beauty, the harmony, the utility, of the whole! In like manner, we reasonably conclude, justice and holiness determine and guide the exercises of his infinite love. It is easy to see, on this principle, that his love is directed by justice and holiness, just as his power, or sovereignty, is by wisdom and goodness.

Sinners of the human race have been the objects of the divine love. Moved by this essential principle in his nature, God hath contrived a way for their redemption

redemption and complete restoration to holiness and happiness. And, unless we suppose infinite love to be partial in its operation towards objects, who, by nature, or in consequence of their relation to sinful Adam, are in a state of perfect moral equality, (which would be a very inconsistent notion of it) we must allow that this way of salvation is equally open to all. Not that it is equally known by all; but that all may be saved through the mediation of CHRIST, if they believe and obey according to the light and advantages of the dispensation under which providence places them. Do we not manifestly derogate from the character of Deity, when we intimate that his natural and moral perfections are not infinite and uniform, free from all partiality, or defect, in their operations? To suppose power is limited by weakness, wisdom by folly, or love by hatred, is very absurd, and diminishes the glory of the divine character. Each of these perfections is equally free from its opposite imperfection. Their harmony with other perfections gives no room for their opposites. Let this be admitted with respect to the attribute of love, and we shall not entertain such ideas of God, as the language of many seems to convey. Impressed with this truth we shall never ascribe any thing to him, which has the appearance of moral evil, or of hatred to any of his creatures.

To take delight in the misery of his creatures, and

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to will it, in such a sense as to chain them down, by an eternal decree, to a course of actions, which shall necessarily, or inevitably, involve them in it, hath too much the appearance of hatred, or malevolence, for me to affirm of that God, who is essentially love. Nor can the idea be reconciled with the generally acknowledged benevolence of Deity. Love and hatred have no affinity. They are in direct opposition the one to the other, and produce different effects.

If love towards one object, and hatred towards another, when both are in a state of the most perfect moral equality, as all men must have been when viewed *feminally* in Adam, and as they now are by nature, be said to be exercised by the Deity, will it not give us very confused and inconsistent notions of his perfections? Can we reconcile such a thought with any principle in reason, with our common ideas of justice, or with true benevolence? The same principle, under precisely the same circumstances, will be always uniform in its operation. Admitting love to be an essential perfection of Deity, as the scriptures clearly affirm, and as the general voice of nature loudly proclaims, every creature will be a happy object of it, who is not denied the privilege by his justice and holiness. These attributes, harmonizing with every other perfection, direct the exercises of infinite love, and determine who are the fit objects of it.

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The subject, thus handled, naturally leads our thoughts into the following train of inferences :

1. That God created man, to be happy in the love of his Maker, and in the enjoyment of all those privileges and blessings, which were suited to his rank in the great scale of being, and which flow from the divine benignity. This appears to have been the original design of the Creator, and the real state of man in innocency. From the Mosaic history of the creation, it is evident that man was an object of the divine love, and possessed power and means to continue in that state, and secure his own happiness.

To say that God absolutely willed the misery of his creature man, and rendered it utterly unavoidable, by a certain combination of causes, or circumstances, is not much to the honor of the attribute of love ; nor very conformable to our general ideas of justice. Common sense speaks a different language, and scripture exhibits a different view of the matter. The perfections of Deity forbid the idea, or lead to the opposite sentiment.

If God be essentially love, the fall and consequent misery of man could not be events, which he absolutely willed, decreed, and brought about by a causal influence. For these are totally inconsistent with a

native disposition and propensity to promote universal happiness. To suppose the disobedience and consequent misery of man to be the natural and necessary effects of a decree and causal influence of Deity, is to entertain a strange idea of his love; and of his justice too, if it be further supposed that the creature is punished for doing the will of his Creator, or not resisting an irresistible influence.

The love, goodness, and benevolence of God, reason teaches us, would dispose him to make man capable of happiness, and to give him power and means to secure it. That he did this, Moses represents to be a fact. It is no derogation from the love, or any other attribute of Deity, to admit that he made creatures capable of plunging themselves into a state of misery, by disobedience to the law of their Creator; inasmuch as they were equally capable of avoiding it, and were cautioned against it.

But to say, the Creator placed man, at first, in such circumstances, or, when he was made, exerted such an influence on him, with design that his sin and consequent misery should be absolutely unavoidable, conveys the idea of hatred and malevolence, rather than of love and good will; and is, in my view, *charging God foolishly*. Nor is it much to the glory of the attribute of love, when we carry our
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views to the posterity of Adam, to suppose it equally delights in the *necessary* happiness of some, and in the *unavoidable* misery of others, who are in a state of moral equality. If this be the case, does it not follow, that this perfection of Deity is not uniform in it's exercise towards objects of precisely the same character? Will love make such a distinction, where there is, in reality, no difference?

The eternal reprobation of a part of mankind, without any regard to what they should do, or not do, in time, seems not very well to comport with what our apostle says of God. Those who directly, or by fair and undeniable implication, say much of the reprobating wrath of Deity, in such a sense of it, must have forgotten that he is essentially love; or they must suppose love is to be qualified by something very much like hatred, and perfected by that which is opposed to it. The doctrine of reprobation, as stated by some, and naturally inferred from the sentiments and language of others, in my view, amounts to an impeachment of the divine love. It militates against the purest doctrines of grace, and suggests the most unworthy ideas of the divine character.

2. We infer from the essential love of God, that the plan of redemption is general, and applicable to the state of all mankind. That the whole race of
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fallen Adam are, by nature, or by virtue of their relation to him and the general corruption derived from him, perfectly equal, in a moral sense, is a point, a fact, which will not be controverted.

One of his descendants could not have been a more worthy object of redeeming love than another. Any plan, therefore, which might render the redemption of one consistent with the justice and holiness of God, would be equally applicable to the state of another. The plan of redemption, therefore, must have been designed for, and applicable to, the state of all; unless it be admitted, contrary to truth and reason, that the love in which it originated is partial in its operations. For the justice and holiness of God, so far as we can see (and further we have no right to affirm) would admit the redemption of one as well as of another, and of all as well as of one; unless we limit the merit and efficacy of the ransom paid by the Saviour.

Reasoning from love, which is an essential perfection of the divine nature, the conclusion is, that all mankind are put into a *salvable* state, by Christ, the second Adam, in whom *all may be made alive*. This comports with several express declarations of scripture. It is, indeed, denied by some: And which of the doctrines of "the gospel of the grace of God"

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hath not been denied? There is no one, perhaps, more clearly and fully asserted than this, That "God so loved the world," not a part of it only, "that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life;" that "by the grace of God Christ tasted death for every man; and that he "is the propitiation for the sins of the *whole* world." From such passages, and the acknowledged perfections of Deity, his love particularly, we infer the present *salvable* state of mankind in general; not that they shall be the heirs of glory before they become *partakers of his holiness*; but that they may, through grace in Christ Jesus, become holy on earth, and happy in heaven. We, therefore, infer,

3. That the future condemnation and punishment of impenitent sinners will be the natural and just consequence of their abuse of redeeming love and grace; and not the effect of eternal reprobating wrath and displeasure, by which it is rendered impossible they should have any interest in the blood of atonement.

It is wrong to infer from the love, or benevolence, of Deity, that the wicked and impenitent shall not be the subjects of future punishment. Their punishment will not be the effect of any thing which hath
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the appearance of malevolence, or delight in their misery. But the love of God will harmonize with his justice and holiness, which require the punishment of obstinate offenders, who will not yield to the endearments of his love and grace; and which will determine who are the qualified subjects of his heavenly kingdom.

The supposition that God absolutely and unconditionally wills, *influentially*, the happiness of one, and the misery of another, when both are alike worthy, or rather unworthy, is repugnant to every idea of the love and justice we ascribe to him. If it be said this is an act of the divine *sovereignty*, to which we ought humbly to submit, without questioning the goodness or justice of it; I would observe, that it yet remains to be proved, that God exercises his sovereignty in such a manner. We, who are but dust, should be all submission to the Father of our spirits, acknowledge his sovereignty, and adore him in all his works—in things which we cannot comprehend. But we ought to consider him as wise, holy, just, and good, in the exercise of his sovereignty; and not borrow our ideas of it from the conduct of earthly tyrants, who have been the enemies of God, and the scourges of the human race. There is no necessity of saying, that God must absolutely exert his sovereignty to make his creatures miserable, in order

to prove that he possesses unlimited power and dominion. The possession of power, or sovereignty, and the exertion of it, for a given purpose, are distinct things. And he is not justly chargeable with denying and opposing the sovereignty of God, who is not convinced that it is exercised in determining the final state of mankind without any regard to their temper and conduct; or in producing sinful volitions and actions, and then awarding punishment to the creatures in whom they are found. We may submit to and adore the sovereignty of God, without supposing it to be exercised in a way, and for purposes, which, in our serious apprehension, are consistent neither with wisdom, goodness, nor justice.

Unless there is some moral difference foreseen between him who is chosen to everlasting life, and him who is reprobated to future misery; where is the wisdom of the choice? It is very little better to deny, or impeach, the wisdom of God, than it is to withhold our praise and acknowledgment of his other attributes. But what room is there for the exercise of wisdom, in chusing one out of a number of perfectly equal objects? Set before a person any number of such equal objects, and can he discover the least wisdom in taking one rather than another? Let reason and common sense decide. And may we not, with proper reverence, apply the same reasoning

soning to the divine conduct in chusing or reprobating mankind? If there is no difference between one and another, can wisdom direct to the choice of one, rather than of another? Some difference in the characters of the objects must be supposed. Wisdom discovers this difference, and accordingly directs the choice. According to the real moral difference among mankind, God will determine their future state, at the great day of accounts. Abusing his love and grace will render them obnoxious to his justice, and fit subjects of punishment. His holiness requires that sinners should be separated from him; but not that he should make men sinners that he may have objects of displeasure and wrath.

Those passages of scripture, which speak of God's *hating the workers of iniquity*, and of his pouring his *wrath and indignation* upon them, I humbly conceive, are designed to represent the purity and rectitude of the divine nature, and to show that sinners are obnoxious to his justice, which he will magnify; opposed to his holiness, and, therefore, cannot, in the nature of things, be the objects of his complacency. Sin is contrary to his nature; and must be viewed with abhorrence and detestation. But it is, at least in my view, extremely wrong to represent the God of love as hateful towards any of his creatures, and as forming schemes in the counsels of his own mind,

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to involve them first in guilt, and then in misery.

Love is as much a part of his character as justice; and hath been as clearly and fully manifested, particularly in the redemption wrought out by Christ, and by his own declaration, that he *delighteth not in the death of the sinner, but had rather he would turn and live*; and that he *would have all men to be saved*.

He hath made rich and ample provision for the recovery and happiness of all, who believe and obey. If any refuse life on these easy terms, and despise the grace and love of God, they must fall into the hands of justice, and suffer according to their folly. Nor is this unreasonable, or a reflection on the attribute of love, which harmonizes with justice and holiness. The attribute of love will be justified against every impeachment, when, at the great day of retribution, justice and holiness consign over to a state of punishment all the impenitent workers of iniquity. But could this be said, if we admit such a partial plan of redemption as implies an absolute impossibility that those, who are the subjects of this punishment, should have been benefited by it? Or if we suppose the mere will of Deity, without the least regard to their temper and actions, in what is called a state of probation, hath absolutely determined their choice, and fixed their future state?

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are abused, and justice demands the punishment of such an offender. But justice admits the salvation of one, and requires the punishment of another, for no other reason than this, because there is really a moral difference between them; love and grace have produced different effects in their hearts and lives. This difference does not, *necessarily*, arise from the electing love and reprobating wrath of Deity; but from a right improvement, or perverse use, of our moral powers, and of the grace that is given us. By grace we are to be saved; but not without the improvement of it. The abuse or neglect of it, is acting in opposition to the love of God, manifested by the plan of redemption, and calling on his justice to display itself in our future condemnation and punishment.

It, therefore, follows, that sinners are the authors of their own sin, and, consequently, of their own misery; and that their future punishment, according to their obstinacy and the aggravations of their guilt, is perfectly consistent with the attribute of love. We are not to account for it by ascribing a malevolent disposition to a pure and holy God, who is essentially love.

Let us seriously contemplate the divine perfections, particularly that essential love, which runs through the works of creation, providence, and redemption,

demption, and which now holds out the offers of eternal salvation to all ; and may we be careful to form our own tempers and conduct according to the model given us in the holy scripture. Having the most exalted conceptions and honorable ideas of the Majesty of heaven, let us *walk every one in the name of his God*, glorify Him by obedience to his will, and conformity to his moral perfections ; and may we be made perfect in love ; the everlasting objects of the divine complacency ; the qualified subjects of his heavenly and eternal kingdom.

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